

041 BOOKER, ARTHUR G.

Printer

Richmond

Practical printer working in Richmond during the War of 1812; proprietor of a job-printing office that printed *The Christian Monitor* weekly for Rev. John Holt Rice (354) in 1815.

Booker is a fleeting figure in the history of Richmond's printing trade, but also a key element in the dissolution of the *Virginia Argus* office in late 1814, after the death of its founder and long-time proprietor, Samuel Pleasants (331). At that time, the *Argus* office was a print-trade amalgam of a newspaper bureau, a printing shop with three presses, a book bindery, a bookstore, and possibly a reading room. After Pleasants died in October 1814, the whole office came under the control of his foreman, John Burke (065), evidently with the approval of his widow, Deborah Whitehead Pleasants (328), administrator of the estate. For the next two months, Burke managed the *Argus* office for the benefit of the estate, while organizing a series of partnerships among Pleasants's staff that would purchase each of the office's component parts. In December, he and Philip DuVal (155), one of Pleasants's journeymen, bought the entire business from the estate. In short order, Burke offered its parts to others, with him as their financial partner, while retaining ownership of the *Argus* itself.

In Burke's plan, Booker was the front man for a new job-printing office that he financed, operating under the name of Arthur G. Booker & Co. Booker was a young journeyman in the *Argus* office at that time, possibly just out of his apprenticeship under Pleasants. This shop would be his first independent press, one that employed one of Pleasants' three presses. On March 29, 1815, Booker and Burke announced their acquisition of "the Book & Job Office lately attached to the *Argus* Office," promising professional-quality work for all who called. Clearly they also had a major patron already lined up for their new shop: a new religious weekly, *The Christian Monitor*, edited by the Presbyterian evangelical, John Holt Rice, who had begun advertising for subscribers just two weeks earlier. Booker issued the first number of Rice's journal from his new office on July 8th, with DuVal as its stated publisher and sold through the bookstore of Frederick A. Mayo (284), Burke's partner in the restructuring of Pleasants' book-selling business.

For the rest of 1815, this arrangement was apparently a functional and profitable one for all concerned. However, notice appeared in the *Argus* on December 2nd announcing Booker's retirement from the firm owing to his "increasing ill health;" he kept control of the debts owed to the firm while Burke took control of the press itself. Burke promptly induced DuVal to take over the press work, and its vital *Christian Monitor*, as his new job-printing partner. Their new firm, however, continued only until April 1816, when DuVal withdrew from all of Burke's schemes, triggering a slow-motion collapse of Burke's would-be empire.

Booker retired to a "small residence" in Amelia County; nonetheless, he never regained his health, dying there on Christmas Eve 1820. His death was recognized as a premature loss. The Richmond *Enquirer's* obituary noted that Booker was "a young man just in the prime of his life," one who was "a man of most sterling integrity" – a glowing epitaph.

Personal Data

Died: Dec. 24 1820 Amelia County, Virginia

No marriages or children discovered.

Sources: Imprints; Hubbard on Richmond; *Tyler's Quarterly*; Richmond newspaper advertisements, 1814-21; obituary in *Richmond Enquirer*, 9 Jan 1821.